CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended.) An apparatus for controlling access of an animal to an opening in which its food is stored, comprising:

A. a standing surface on which the animal places at least part of its weight;

B. a chassis connected to or integral with the standing surface and supported essentially parallel to both said standing surface and a base, the chassis having an opening in which food can be placed;

C. a movable connection between the base and the chassis allowing the chassis to move towards and away from the base while maintaining [[the]] said essentially parallel ~~configuration~~ orientation;

D. at least one door attached to the chassis by a door pivot and adapted to cover the opening in which the food is placed and pivoting in a plane essentially parallel with said essentially parallel orientation;

E. a lever, pivotally connected to the chassis by a first pivot, having a first arm that engages the base and a second arm that engages the door to move the door about the door pivot; and

F. a tension rod including a spring tending the pivot arm away from engagement with the door.

2. (Original.) The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising a skirt depending from the standing surface and a shield rising from the standing surface to provide an opening for access to the platform.

3. (Original.) The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising means for changing the tension on the tension rod.

4. (Currently amended.) A method for controlling access of an animal to an opening in which its food is stored, comprising:

A. providing a platform on which the animal places its feet and having an opening through which the animal can access its food;

B. providing at least one movable door for preventing access to the food, the door adapted to move essentially parallel to the platform;

C. providing a base parallel with the platform and to which the platform is connected, and allowing movement of the platform towards and away from the base while maintaining the parallel orientation;

D. providing a lever that engages and moves the door as a function of the distance between the platform and the base;

E. providing tension on the lever to inhibit engagement of the lever with the door; and

F. allowing an animal to stand on the platform, thereby causing the platform to move vertically towards the base if the weight of the animal is sufficient to overcome the tension, such vertical movement ~~rotating the lever and engaging~~ effective to cause the lever ~~with the door to move the door~~ to open the door to provide access through the opening or to close the door to prevent access through the opening.

5. (Original.) The method of claim 4, wherein the door closes upon movement of the platform towards the base.

6. (Original.) The method of claim 4, wherein the door opens upon movement of the platform towards the base.

7. (Currently amended.) Apparatus for controlling an animal's access to food, comprising:

A. a base;

B. a chassis having a standing surface and disposed essentially parallel to and movable with respect to the base, the chassis having a port through which food is accessed;

C. a movable door for opening and/or closing the port, the door adapted to move essentially parallel to the standing surface;

D. movement means for allowing the chassis and the base to move together and apart, said movement means maintaining the essentially parallel orientation of the chassis and base;

E. force means comprising a user-adjustable force for opposing the animal's weight; and

F. door means for opening [[and/or]] or closing the door based on movement between the chassis and the base.

8. (Currently amended.) The apparatus of claim 7, [[wherin]] wherein the movement means [[is]] includes parallel arms.

9. (Original.) The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the force means comprises a spring.

10. (Currently amended.) The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the door means includes a lever pivotally attached to the chassis, the lever having a first arm that interacts with the base and a second arm that interacts with the door.

11. (Currently amended.) A method for providing selective access, comprising:

A. providing (i) a chassis having (a) a platform for accepting a pressure force ~~from an animal~~ due to an animal's weight, (b) an access hole, and (c) a movable barrier ~~removeable from and replaceable on~~ for covering and uncovering the access hole, the barrier adapted to move essentially parallel with the platform, and (ii) a base;

B. controlling movement of the chassis towards and away from the base so as to maintain a desired essentially parallel orientation [[of]] between the ~~chassis~~ platform and the base;

C. applying a counterforce acting between the chassis and the base to resist said pressure force; and

D. mechanically transmitting the difference between the pressure force and the counterforce to remove or to ~~replace~~ cover or uncover said ~~closure~~ access hole with said movable barrier, respectively, when the pressure force exceeds the counterforce, and, respectively, ~~replacing or removing said closure~~ uncovering or covering said access hole with said movable barrier when the counterforce exceeds the pressure force.

12. (New.) The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising a shield upstanding from the platform to provide a particular opening area for access to the platform.

13. (New.) The method of claim 4, further comprising providing a shield upstanding from the platform to provide a particular opening area for access to the platform.

14. (New.) The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the standing surface further comprises a shield upstanding therefrom to provide a particular opening area for access to the platform.

15. (New.) The method of claim 11, further comprising providing a shield upstanding from the platform to provide a particular opening area for access to the platform.

16. (New.) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the movable connection includes a pair of parallely disposed bars.

17. (New.) The method of claim 4, wherein the movement of the platform towards and away from the base includes a pair of parallely disposed bars.

18. (New.) The apparatus of claim 7, wherein the movement means includes a pair of parallely disposed bars.

19. (New.) The method of claim 11, wherein the step of controlling the movement includes the step of movably connecting the chassis and the base with a pair of parallely disposed bars.

20. (New.) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the tension on the tension rod is adjustable.

21. (New.) The method of claim 4, further comprising the step of adjusting the tension on the lever.

22. (New.) The method of claim 11, wherein the counterforce is an adjustable force.